

# LAND



## WATER: MAKING THE CONNECTION

### 1 *Water is a limited, finite resource for which there is increasing competition.*

- New Mexico grew twenty percent between 1990 and 2000, the 12<sup>th</sup> fastest growth rate of any state.<sup>i</sup> This rapid increase in population puts a strain on our water supply.
- New Mexico is a semiarid state that receives on average only 13 inches of precipitation a year, 96% of which evaporates.<sup>ii</sup>
- All surface water from lakes and streams have been allocated for specific use, and in many places, such as Albuquerque, ground water is being pumped faster than it is being replenished.
- If there are more droughts, as predicted, the situation can only get worse.

### 2 *Development decisions made with out consideration of water availability do not balance water demand with water supply.*

- In the area from Cochiti Reservoir to the Elephant Butte Reservoir, 175 miles of the Rio Grande where approximately 700,000 New Mexicans live, water supply is equal to present water demand on average.<sup>iii</sup> Therefore new development will require existing users to give up or reduce their water use.
- The Focus 2050 Regional Plan for Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, and Valencia counties, which provides a land use scenario for future growth and development of the region, was prepared without consideration of existing and future water needs and supply.<sup>iv</sup>
- Haphazard development continues without an understanding of the consequences on the water supply.

### 3 *Urban sprawl and the increased competition for limited water resources lead to loss of rural farmland and wildlife habitat and the erosion of important cultural traditions.*

- In 2000, there were three million fewer acres of farmland then there had been in 1975.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> 2000 Census. Online, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

<sup>ii</sup> Bureau of Reclamation, *New Mexico Water Resources: Assessment for Planning Purposes*, 1976, pp. 10, 12.

<sup>iii</sup> S.S. Papadopoulos & Associates, Inc., *Middle Rio Grande Water Supply Study*, August, 2000, pp. ES – 2-3.

<sup>iv</sup> Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments of New Mexico, *Focus 2050, Regional Plan*, 2000, p. 60: “In future refinements to the plan, natural resources limitations affecting growth need to be considered as more information is developed. Water, in particular, is a limiting factor to sustainable growth; and it is the subject of a future plan element. Updates to the Regional Plan should incorporate the best available information from regional water planning as this information becomes available.”

<sup>v</sup> USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *Farm and Land in Farms*, 2001; USDA, *Farm Numbers and Land in Farms*, 1999.

- Sprawling development transfers water to urban uses, lowering ground water levels or reducing stream flows. This has negatively impacted rural areas like la Cienega, Tomé, and Placitas.
- As more water is diverted to development, less water flows through our streams, threatening important native trees such as the cottonwood and endangered animal species like the silvery minnow and willow flycatcher. New Mexico has already lost over one-half of the fish native to the Rio Grande.<sup>vi</sup>

#### 4 *When development decisions ignore consideration of water, a community loses its ability to determine how scarce water resources are allocated.*

- Quail Ranch in Bernalillo County and Campbell Ranch in Sandoval, Santa Fe and Bernalillo counties, if approved, together will be home to more than 55,000 people on almost 15,000 acres. The developers have provided inadequate assurances to elected officials or the public that there will be sufficient paper water rights or adequate wet water resources to accommodate either of these projects.<sup>vii</sup>
- When water is allocated by default, less water is available for allocation in accordance with a community's priorities, such as affordable housing, riparian areas, or parks.

To more carefully manage our land and water, we propose that:

1. State and local governments prepare realistic water budgets and balance supply with present and future demands.
2. Land use planning and water planning be connected, and growth and development be consistent with those plans.
3. The planning process protects and balance agricultural, environmental, economic, municipal, and cultural uses of water.
4. Our decisions about future water use and new development are driven by a community's plan, and citizen input into the planning process be facilitated.

This document was written by a group of people who work on land and water use issues and who met for over a year in an effort to understand the relationship between land and water in New Mexico the authors of this document include:

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<sup>vi</sup> James E. Sublette, Michael D. Hatch, Mary Sublette, *The Fishes of New Mexico*, 1990, p. 23.

<sup>vii</sup> Quail Ranch: Memorandum of Opinion, *1000 Friends of New Mexico*, et. Al. v. Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Extraterritorial Land Use Authority and Black Ranch Joint Venture, 2001, pp. 8-10; Campbell Ranch: Office of the State Engineer, subdivision review letters, 2000.